

✠ THE REASONS FOR THE CHANGE OF THE PATRISTIC CALENDAR ✠

The letter below, addressed to the new calendar bishops of Greece, is from Archimandrite Nektarios Moulatsiotis of the new calendar Church of Greece, and needs no commentary.

Your Eminences, bless.

Keeping in mind from the start—in order to remove any misunderstanding—that I, as well as our holy monastery, follow the new calendar, we would like to note some essential points about the calendar problem so that we may contribute to its resolution, as far as possible.

As is known, the venerable, sacred and holy Synod of our Orthodox Church, under the leadership of His Beatitude, Archbishop Seraphim, heard the study on the old calendar issue prepared by His Eminence, Metropolitan Augustine of Florina, and decided that the issue should be considered by the upcoming Ecumenical *[sic]* Pan-Orthodox Council. We believe that what should be emphasized in this wonderful study by Metropolitan Augustine is that the issue is not about the calendar, that is, the thirteen days; nor is it an issue of salvation or an issue of faith, as Metropolitan Christodoulos of Demetrias stated truthfully. The issue is why we who follow the new calendar changed that which our Orthodox Church had for twenty centuries. It is a delusion to believe that the difference between us and the old calendarists is thirteen days. This is not the issue. The truth of the matter is, unfortunately, to be found in our Ecumenical Patriarchate's Encyclical of 1920.

Our venerable Ecumenical Patriarchate knows, as we do, why we accepted this change. It is therefore necessary to see what the Ecumenical Patriarchate says, and why the change of the calendar was introduced in the first place, followed by the rest of the changes that were proposed by the holy hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne.

Let us therefore read the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920, which introduces the calendar change, and its consequences will become apparent immediately and easily.

Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1920

"To the Churches of Christ Wheresoever They Might Be"

"Love one another earnestly from the heart." (I Peter 1:22)

Our own church believes that rapprochement among the various Christian Churches and communion among them is not excluded by the doctrinal differences which exist among them, and that such a rapprochement is highly desirable, necessary, and useful in many ways for the edifying profit of each particular church and of the whole Christian body, and also for the preparation and facilitation of that full and blessed union that will be accomplished in the future with God's help. We therefore consider that the present time is most favourable for re-examining this important question and studying it together. . . .

After this essential re-establishment of sincerity and confidence among the churches, we think that, above all, love should be rekindled and strengthened among the churches, so that they should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as kinsmen, and as being a part of the household of Christ and "fellow heirs, and formed of the same body and partakers of the same promise of God in Christ" (Eph. 3:6).

In our opinion, such a friendship and kindly disposition towards each other can be shown and demonstrated particularly in the following ways:

- a) through the adoption by all the Churches of one single calendar so that the great Christian feasts may be everywhere celebrated simultaneously;
- b) through the exchange of fraternal letters on the occasion of the great feasts of the ecclesiastical year, as is the custom, and on other special occasions;

- c) through more fraternal relations among the representatives of the different Churches;
- d) through establishing relations between the theological schools and the representatives of theological science, and the exchange of theological and ecclesiastical periodicals and works published by each Church;
- e) through sending young men from one Church to the schools of other Churches for their studies;
- f) through the convocation of pan-Christian assemblies for the examination of matters of common interest to all the Churches;
- g) through the dispassionate and more historical examination of the dogmatic differences from a scholarly point of view and by dissertations;
- h) through mutual respect for the practices and customs of the various Churches;
- i) through reciprocal granting of houses of prayer and cemeteries for funerals and burials of the adherents of other confessions who have died in foreign lands;
- j) through the implementation of common rules by the different confessions concerning the question of mixed marriages;
- k) through a reciprocal and voluntary support of the Churches in the realm of religious edification, philanthropy and other such activities.

In the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in the month of January, in the year of grace, 1920.

The *Locum Tenens* of the Patriarchal Ecumenical Throne:

✠ Dorotheos, Metropolitan of Prusa

The Members of the Holy Synod:

✠ Nicholas, Metropolitan of Caesaria

✠ Constantine, Metropolitan of Cyzicus

✠ Germanos, Metropolitan of Amasia

✠ Gerasimos, Metropolitan of Pisidia

✠ Gervasios, Metropolitan of Ancyra

✠ Anthimos, Metropolitan of Vizya

✠ Evgenios, Metropolitan of Selyvria

✠ Agathangelos, Metropolitan of Saranta Ecclesiae

✠ Chrysostom, Metropolitan of Tyroloë and Serention

✠ Irenaios, Metropolitan of the Dardanelles and Lampsacus

First, we can conclude the following from the above Encyclical: the holy hierarchs of the Ecumenical Throne call all the heresies "Churches of Christ" and emphasize that our dogmatic differences do not impede our approaching one another, and communion is not precluded. Having expressed their conclusions, what they end up saying is that in order for one church to approach the other and for union among the churches finally to occur, the eleven steps proposed by the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate must be taken.

The first step in the rapprochement and union of all the churches would be the calendar change, so that we might celebrate with those in heresy, as the above Encyclical states. Therefore, whoever wanted the union of the churches and their rapprochement, in spite of the existing dogmatic differences ("an unhealthy ecumenism," according to the Metropolitan of Demetrias), accepted the proposal of the Patriarchal Synod and changed the calendar. The "whoever" are all of us and whoever else followed or follows the new calendar. Our acceptance of the new calendar bears witness that we have an "unhealthy ecumenism." And the most frightful thing of all is that we attempt to persuade our people by telling them that we have a "healthy ecumenism"!

Unfortunately, we say one thing and do another. We are sometimes Orthodox in what we say, or sometimes unhealthy Orthodox in what we say, but we are certainly unhealthy ecumenists in our deeds. How is it possible for us to say that "Orthodoxy considers dogmatic unity a presupposition to the common Cup; for this reason we do not concelebrate with the non-Orthodox" (as Metropolitan Christodoulos stated on February 21, 1995) while the Patriarchal Encyclical says the exact opposite?

Also, how can we say such falsehoods when our Ecumenical Patriarchs have gone to the Vatican in an official capacity and prayed jointly with the Latins, and the Latins come to Orthodox churches and pray with Orthodox hierarchs? How is it possible to fool ourselves and others when we knowingly say these falsehoods? There exist an abundance of videos and photographs of such concelebrations and common Mysteries (weddings); is it possible to say that these things do not go on in Orthodoxy? Why do we deny the truth? Further, the distinguished Professor Evangelos Theodorou wrote an extensive article in *Orthodoxos Typos* last year and testified that, unfortunately, most of our Orthodox hierarchs are possessed by "unhealthy Ecumenism." Let us, at least, admit our tragic mistakes.

Those, however, who did not desire these [ecumenistic] contacts with those in heresy, or these unions of the churches "without dogmatic union," did not adopt the proposals made in the Patriarchal Encyclical and they remained with the old calendar. Simply, that is how things are. Why do we try to complicate them?

Finally, our venerable Holy Synod must ask the clergy and the laity: "Do we, the Church of Greece, want the union of the churches despite the existing dogmatic differences, or do we not?" Because, if we do not want such a union, why then did we follow and continue to follow the proposals of the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920?

Is it not ironic for us, on the one hand, to say "no" to such types of unions, and then on the other hand, to enforce the proposals of the Encyclical of 1920?

This is the main point. This is the issue and the problem. We say one thing and do another. We as Orthodox say *no to such types of union*, therefore we must disavow the application of the 1920 Patriarchal Encyclical by abandoning the "unhealthy ecumenism" that we have today, and we must return to our former state. We believe that placing this issue on the agenda of the future Pan-Orthodox Council is not the correct solution to this matter, because the calendar change did not come about as the result of a Pan-Orthodox Council. Why, then, should we discuss its resolution today by means of a Pan-Orthodox Council? And, as the Metropolitan of Florina said, it is preferable for us (he means our entire official church) to return to the old calendar and be called anachronistic by some members of the press rather than to be condemned, or at some point to be characterized as *heretics*.

Your Eminence, there is, unfortunately, only one solution if we truly want to heal the open wound that was created by the change of the calendar. It is to erase the reasons which created it. Otherwise, we will be accountable before God and history, because we who accepted the new calendar created the problem, and not they who refused to change, thereby demonstrating that they refuse union with the Latins under the conditions outlined in the 1920 Patriarchal Encyclical.

Would not a new problem be created even today, should the representatives of the Ecumenical Throne and the other Orthodox churches undertake such unions, without dogmatic agreement, recognizing the errors of the western denominations as "local customs and usages"? The hasty handling of such serious issues, unfortunately, creates problems. Indeed, special care is required in endeavors that concern the union of the Orthodox with those in heresy.

The solution, therefore, is in our hands. We must eliminate the reasons that created this problem for us, because what is going on today is tragic: that is, we call those who follow the old calendar heretics and schismatics and urge our Christians to have no dealings with them, while we call those of the West who are truly schismatics and heretics "brothers" and "sister churches," and go into their churches and pray with them. Therefore, the only cure for this issue is to eliminate the causes that created it.

Let us decide, therefore, because the issue of the calendar is, in essence, the uncovering of our identity, that is, if we are *pro-union* or *anti-union*.

We all know that His Beatitude, our Archbishop Seraphim, is anti-unionist, as he has stated many times. Therefore, let him make one more courageous pronouncement that will make his name go down in history: that he ceases, as an anti-unionist, to enforce the 1920 Encyclical, and that he is returning the Greek Church to its pre-1920 state; something which all the holy elders of the twentieth century, such as Father Philotheos Zervakos, sought, and which would immediately resolve the old calendar problem, if they [the new calendar bishops, such as those mentioned in the beginning of this letter] want to resolve it indeed, and are not just engaged in rhetorical discussions. May God help you to proceed with boldness and courage to the solution of this problem that has already distressed our country for seventy years. It is certain that your names will go down in history and your Local Synod will be invested with the authority of an Ecumenical Orthodox Synod. AMEN.

Archimandrite Nektarios Moulatsiotis, abbot.*

Editor's Note: Three years after the above letter was published in 1995, the new calendar Church of Greece has yet to change back to the traditional calendar or terminate its involvement in Ecumenism.

An Excerpt from

On the Subject of the Union of the "Churches"

by Rev. Hieromonk Euthymios Trikamenas

(a priest of the new calendar Church of Greece)

It is perplexing that when our [new calendar] bishops hear the term "old calendarist" they become like wild animals and say the worse things, whereas when it comes to the Papists and the Protestants, who have overturned everything that pertains to the Faith and tradition, our bishops are so benign. In my opinion, this happens because the old calendarists continually remind us of our sins and betrayals [of the Faith], and because, in our days, the plans of the Ecumenists are becoming much clearer; for they began with the change of the church calendar with the purpose of uniting completely with those in heresy which appears to be happening in our days, thereby completely justifying [the traditional Orthodox Christians].

(Orthodoxos Typos, July 28, 1995)